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[71] deity. Besides these, there are innumerable private snake shrines, particularly in pious households.

753 All diseases or misfortunes are due to the neglect of snakes.
825 Leprosy, itches, sterility of women and deaths due to poison,
171 are attributed to the anger of snake gods. The remedy for
782 snake-bite lies in the propitiation of serpents through worship
78 at the snake shrine. If no such shrine exists, then a diligent
search is made and a 'snake stone' is dug up from the vicinity.
Thereafter this accidental find of the snake stone is duly consecrated and worshipped, and all the erstwhile troubles are attributed to the inadvertent neglect of the sacred stone. The person
[766] dying of snake-bite is taboo, because his body is supposed to be occupied thereafter by the snake god; and it needs to be disposed of in a special manner with particular reverence and specific rituals.

● 771 Among the Nayars of South India snake worship assumes
825 unique importance. It is popularly believed that in early times a
779 Pambakattu Nambutiri brahmin brought the serpents with him
796 and left them in their present abode. He however promised to
[173] return one day but never did. Strangely enough, in Travancore, a Pambakattu Nambutiri family still resides and is not permitted to enter the Manarsalil temple for fear that the snakes might leave the area and follow the brahmin to his abode. In a special ceremony called *havu muttam* or the shifting of the snake shrines from one place to another in the compound of the house—if accidentally the shrine is awkwardly situated in a plot of land where construction is to begin—the Pambakattu Nambutiri is called specially to do the necessary shifting ceremony. He purifies the new area and transfers the shrine to the newly consecrated spot, to the accompaniment of sacred incantations. Thereafter there is feasting and the brahmin is paid money and is presented with a set of new clothes. This is in striking coincidence with the legend of origin, and lends credence to the story of the origin of snake worship, particularly in Manarsalil temple in Quilon, as being connected with Pambakattu Nambutiri brahmins.

778 The plans of snake shrines have much in common, though some are small and some big. The Manarsalil temple

June 1956] Mehra : SNAKE WORSHIP IN SOUTH INDIA 135

is surrounded by a series of concentric circles as it were, on the outside is a wide road where fairs are held and much commerce goes on on festive days. The low castes cannot go beyond this outer fringe. Lodged within, is the garden where the snakes are to be seen in their natural habitat. In this area is a sacred tank, the water of which is rather dirty due to falling vegetation, but which is reputed to be medicinal in property. Here too is a very large vessel into which milk is poured by the priest so that the snakes might be well fed. Within this belt of vegetation and bushes is the shrine itself. There is a verandah with a central hall called *mandapa* with an open space in front, and in the centre is the platform where the snake deities are enshrined. There are two images here, one of Nag Raj with five heads and the other of a serpent with only one head. This is the inner sanctuary where only the priest enters. In Manarsalil temple a virgin priestess conducts the most sacred rites and is considered to be the guardian of the serpents. 778 [564] 778 825

A similar position pertains among the Meitheis of Manipur, where a priestess looks after the serpent god called Pak-hangba.* Near the verandah is a sacred well from which water is drawn as offering to the deities and is afterwards distributed to the devotees as holy water. It is believed that only pious people can see the snakes in the forest and the wicked cannot. The devotee considers himself blessed if he is able to catch a glimpse of the snake while on his way to the temple. [172]

The common private snake shrine in Travancore lies within the compound of the house, often near the boundary, and away from the main building, in order to best preserve its sanctity and to avoid accidental pollution by inadvertent trespass by some members of the family. The abode of the snake god is called *sarpa kavu*, and this is usually a raised patch of land surrounded by bushes and trees. In the foliage there must be a plant yielding milky sap and in the absence of such a plant, one is planted near the shrine. The trees near the shrine are never cut and the area in the vicinity of the *sarpa kavu* is kept very clean. Often granite images of many-headed snakes with spreading 825 778 351 771 [24] 825 778 771

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hoods are placed in the shrine, and no insect or rat or other animal is killed in the consecrated spot. Even broken bits of snake images are worshipped and they are set up in a row. No image or snake-stone is permitted to fall down, as that is considered to be inauspicious. On the inner surface of the hood of the snake is carved a seated female figure.

These sacred snakes are supposed to be different from the ordinary serpents. They are given the status of benign family deities and are presumed to possess strange powers and the attribute of gods. They are revered and they deign to live only under ceremonially pure conditions and surroundings, accepting only vegetarian offerings and abhorring animal sacrifice. In contrast mention may be made of the Thlen of the Khasis which demands human blood as offering. In the event

however of their abode being polluted, e. g., by a menstruating woman, the serpents are angered, and unless propitiated may cause disease or harm to the offender. The sacred serpent called *sarpam* is supposed to be small, about 6 to 18 inches in length and is golden in colour. It is highly poisonous but ordinarily does not do any harm. If properly propitiated it guards the family and brings good luck and prosperity; but if neglected, insulted, or otherwise uncared for, it causes skin disease, leprosy or loss of sight. Such a punishment is visited on the offender or on his near relatives. As a consequence certain taboos are attached to the shrines and no menstruating or pregnant woman may come within six yards of the shrine, nor should anyone enter it without taking a bath.

The actual worship or *puja* is conducted either once or twice a year. The priest cooks rice in milk and adds pieces of ripe plantain to it, with a few flowering heads of the sacred *tulasi* plant dropped in towards the end. The offering is cooked on a special oven near the *sarpa kavu* in a bell-metal vessel. Thereafter, the priest pours some water over the snake idols to ceremonially bathe them and places a bunch of areca-nut palm in efflorescence on the head of the image in a diagonal fashion. The idol is then anointed with turmeric powder and basil leaves and flower petals are

June 1956] Mehra: SNAKE WORSHIP IN SOUTH INDIA 139

of particular impor-
tance is the ritual conducted in the case of barren women who seek divine intercession of the serpent gods. The afflicted couple come on a Sunday morning to the snake temple after a purificatory bath and after putting on new garments. They request the priest to conduct a propitiatory *puja* and offer flour to the deity. Thereafter, a bronze plate on which the name of the person is carved is placed inverted at a spot. After a year when they have been blessed with a child, they repair to the temple once more to offer thanks for the boon granted. The child is helped to lift the bronze plate and under it a small serpent is observed signifying that all is well. In the event of there being no snake underneath, it is taken as a bad omen predicting the death of the child. If even after ten years no child is born to the couple, the unretrieved bronze plate is discarded, on the presumption that the deity has not seen fit to grant the wishes of the devotees. [762
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There is also a class of pious people who have through their devotion to, and worship of, the snake deity, acquired the art of curing victims of snake-bite. They are called *sarpa vaidyas* and cases of snake-bite are brought to them for treatment. The man chants certain magical formulae and tears a betel leaf in front of a pot of milk. The serpent is supposed to come out of hiding and to withdraw the venom, thus effecting a gradual cure. 755
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But modern trends are contrariwise, and a gradual decline is discernible in the ritual of snake worship in a large majority of households which have snake shrines. Less emphasis is paid to the traditional worship of the serpent, and what little propitiation is done is more or less symbolic. Makeshift arrangements are often made, and worship by proxy is offered by the priest, in the absence of the family members, who merely pay a fixed sum to the priest for his labours, and thereby absolve themselves of the guilt of neglecting the snake gods. 178
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Apart from simplification of the ritual of snake worship, yet another symptom of the decay of the cult appears to be the reduced importance that is given to the upkeep of the existing snake shrines. Many erstwhile sacred shrines are in a dilapidated condition. Perhaps in future, snake worship itself might become a thing of the past. [778]

REFERENCES

- 1. Tait: *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, 96.
- 2. Hodson & MacLagan: *Glossary of Tribes and Castes of Punjab & N. W. F. P.*, 149. 113
- 3. Gordon: *The Khasis*, 98-102.
- 4. Dubois & Beauchamps: *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, 641.
- 5. Hodson: *The Mithels*, 110.

Hair on the arms.—In half the number of subjects it varied from moderate to thick; in the other half it was slight to very slight or (in a few) absent altogether.

Hair on the legs.—In more than half it varied from moderately thick to very thick. One was noted as "like a bear." In one individual only it was noted as very slight.

Colour of the skin.—The darkest (one only) was between 42 and 43 (Broca's colour types). Two others were nearly as dark. The fairest was 44. Two others were nearly as fair. The average is between these extremes.

Colour of the eyes.—The darkest was No. 1 (Broca's colour types). The lightest between 2 and 3. Rather more than half were 2 or shades of 2, generally lighter, while nearly one-half were No. 1.

Ornaments.—As a rule the ordinary earrings are worn. A section of the clan calling themselves Ellenkiria (or Elleng Kiria—tender Kiria?) wear no earrings, though their ears are pierced. Some members of this section told me they never wore earrings, while others said they could wear them as a rule, but they could not wear them when they went to the Kōvilakam (palace) of the Zamorin.

The right nostril of one man was slit vertically as if for insertion of a jewel. His mother miscarried in her first pregnancy, so, according to custom, he, the child of her second pregnancy, had had his nose slit.

Another wore a silver bangle. He had had a wound on his arm which was long in healing, so made a vow to the God at Tirupati (North Arcot District) that, if his arm was healed, he would give up the bangle at the Tirupati temple. He intended to send the bangle by a messenger, any one going to Tirupati, when his arm was quite healed: then only would he fulfil his vow. If this illustrates how a vow may be fulfilled,—he had not vowed to go himself and give the bangle up, only to give the bangle which was meanwhile convenient as an ornament,—the man's ideas about the God at Tirupati illustrate the confused ideas as to the personality and attributes of the Gods of Modern Hinduism which obtain in Malabar. He thought it was Baghavati whose shrine was the object of pilgrimage to Tirupati, but was not at all sure; indeed he was not sure whether it was a God or a Goddess. It is scarcely necessary to say that the God at Tirupati is a form of Vishnu.

Other individuals wore ornaments, thus—

(1) Gold ring on ring-finger of the left hand. Ear-rings with red stone. Amulet against the evil eye.

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the only thing to be done for the deceased is the annual shraddham, or yearly funeral commemorative rite. Rice balls (pindams) are made and given to crows. Clapping of hands announces to these birds that the rice is being thrown for them, and, should they come at once and eat it, it is obvious that the spirit of the deceased is pleased with the offering, and is not likely to be troublesome. But, on the other hand, should they not come and eat, it is evident that the spirit is displeased, and the Taravâd had better look out. [25]

The ceremonial connected with the funeral rites which have been described, illustrates the immense difference which exists, as it does in the case of all peoples more or less cultured, between the primitive belief of the race, and the higher, the more abstract, religion which they believe they believe. With races, as with children, the earliest associations are the strongest, and persist through the life of the race as through the life of the individual. The higher power of reasoning which comes with higher development does not disperse them altogether. The people who practise these rites are good Hindus, and, according to the theory of their Hindu religion, the spirit which is emancipated from the body at death at once inhabits another body, for suffering or for enjoyment measured by the deserts of the bodily existence which has just ceased. This is the higher religion. And yet they admit that the spirit is connected with the shadow, not with the breath;—and feel in their hearts that it still lingers in the house and absorbs the essence of the ingredients of the food offered to it; that it must be propitiated or it will cause harm to the living. This is the primitive religion. It is supposed that the spirits of those whose ashes are deposited at Benares or other place of sanctity, and for whose sake alms are given to Brâhmans, remain at those holy spots, and become more and more god-like. This is a mixture of both. We are here concerned with facts rather than theories and, as much has been said already of this side of the subject of comparative religions, we may proceed with our facts. The spirits of those who have committed suicide or met death by any violent means are always particularly vicious and troublesome to the Taravâd, their spirit possessing and rendering miserable some unfortunate member of it. Unless pacified they will ruin the Taravâd, so Brâhman priests are called in and appease them by means of Tilahômam, a rite in which sacrificial fire is raised, and ghee, gingelly and other things are offered through it. [769] [822] [782] [766] [613] [782]

RELIGION.

771 It will be easier to convey a rational conception of the religion of the Nâyars, not by what is written but by what is left out; so we will proceed on this plan. The ceremonies connected with marriage and death go far towards indicating what are their religious ideas in general. The conservative character of the people of (181) Malabar whose country is an earthly paradise, severed from the major portion of the Indian peninsula by the high mountains of the Western Ghâts, secure in its happy seclusion, where Nature has lavished her gifts with the prodigality of a Bacchante, prepares us for finding much of the primitive element in their religion. With the more uncultivated, the wilder races, this is almost entirely primitive in character; no more the cult of a Siva or Vishnu than of Sqakktquaclt.

As has been remarked already ("Nambútiris" Bulletin, Vol. III, No. I), we see in Malabar the most undiluted form of the highest, the most abstract religion of Southern India, side by side with the most entirely primitive. The Nâyars have much of both.

The saying, "cleanliness is next to godliness," is one of those which contain much more real wisdom than is usually apprehended. The world is really divided, as I think Mr. Havelock Ellis points out, between the dirty and the clean; and, if I err not, the same author tells us that clothed man cannot be truly clean. Man has advanced far in development when he has become a clean animal. Now the Nâyars' religion is one of cleanliness, undiminished by superabundant clothing. Men and (291) women can scarcely wear less than they do in compatibility with the received ideas of decency and propriety, (515) nor can they be more scrupulous in the matter of personal cleanliness. No Nayar, unless one utterly degraded by (264) the exigencies of a Government office, would eat his food without having bathed and changed his cloth. It is a rule seldom broken that every Nayar goes to the temple to pray at least once a day after having bathed; generally twice a day. The mere approach anywhere near his (783) vicinity of a Cheruman, a Polayan or any inferior being, even a Tiyan, as he walks to his house from the temple, cleansed in body and mind, his marks newly set on his forehead with sandalwood paste, is pollution, and he must turn and bathe again ere he can enter his house and eat. Buchanan tells us that in his time, about 99 years ago, the man of inferior caste thus approaching

the Nāyar would be cut down instantly with a sword: there would be no words. Now that the people of India are inconvenienced with an Arms Act which inhibits sword play of this kind, and with a law-system under which high and low are rated alike, the Nāyar has to content himself with an imperious grunt-like shout for the way to be cleared for him as he stalks on unperturbed. His arrogance is not diminished, but he cannot now show it in quite the same way. 683
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Doubtless the natural habit of seclusion common to Malabar, rendered easy by the wealth of vegetation of which those who have never visited shores somewhat alike climatically can have no conception, has favoured the persistence of earlier forms of belief; but, whatever may be the reason for it, there is much more of the extremes of religious belief to be seen amongst the Nāyars than amongst any other people or caste of Southern India. 771

It has been noticed already how that the Malayalis have, practically, no sects such as obtain throughout the rest of Southern India. Vishnu, Siva, Bhagavati, Rama—all these names of the Hindu theogony are meaningless to them. They do not know one from the other except in name. Their Hinduism is not that of the rest of Southern India. (795)

It is time to come to concrete example, so I will attempt a description of the ceremonial observed at the Pishāri kāvū—the Pishāri temple near Quilandy on the coast 15 miles north of Calicut, where Bhagavati is supposed in vague legend to have slain an Asura or gigantic ogre, in commemoration of which event the festival is held yearly to Bhagavati and her followers. It is fairly representative. The deity of the temple Bhagavati is spoken of as feminine in the spirit of accuracy, but it is extremely unlikely whether ten per cent. of the crowd even thought of sex in connection with Bhagavati. Sacrifice of goats as part of the ceremonial was at first denied: it is a mystery too awful to be the subject of conversation. At the same time, I am inclined to think that much the weightier reason is that the priests who cling to this part of the ceremonial are ashamed to let it be known to the people that they do it. They like it to be thought that such sacrifice is appropriate to the inferior races, but that *they* are above it and have nothing to do with it! 796
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The festival lasts for seven days. When I visited it in 1895 the last day was on the 31st of March. Before

796 of the festival, so make the following excerpt from
 184 Mr. Logan's well-known "Manual of Malabar." "It takes
 788 the people in great crowds from their homes. The whole
 country near the lines of march rings with the shouts
 'Nada-a Nada-a' of the pilgrims to the favourite shrines,
 chief of which is that at Cranganore (Kodungallûr) in the
 Native State of Cochin. Of what takes place when the
 pilgrims reach this spot perhaps the less said the better.
 In their passage up to the shrine the cry of 'Nada-a
 Nada-a' (march, march away) is varied by terms of un-
 measured abuse levelled at the goddess (a Bhagavati) of
 the shrine. This abusive language is supposed to be
 acceptable to her. On arrival at the shrine they desecrate
 it in every conceivable way, believing that this too is
 acceptable; they throw stones and filth, howling volleys
 of opprobrium at her house. The chief of the fisherman
 564 caste, styled *Kûli Muttatta Arayan*, has the privilege of
 782 being the first to begin the work of polluting the *Bhoot*
 or shrine. Into other particulars it is unnecessary to
 enter; cocks are slaughtered and sacrificed. The wor-
 shipper gets flowers only, and no holy water after paying
 his vows. Instead of water he proceeds outside and
 drinks arrack or toddy, which an attendant Nayar serves
 out. All castes are free to go, including Tiyars and low
 caste people. The temple was originally only a Bhoot
 or holy tree with a platform. The image in the temple is
 said to have been introduced only of recent years." It is
 a pity Mr. Logan is so reticent. My information is that
 the headman of the Mukkuvans (fisher caste) opens the
 festival by solemnly making a foecal deposit on the
 image. Here again there is the same strange union of
 everything that is filthy, abusive, foul and irreverent,
 with every mode of expressing the deepest religious
 feeling.

Leaving now the religion, expression of which may
 be seen at temple festivals and during pilgrimages to
 these scenes of religious fervour, we will turn to that
 which we see in the house of the Nayar at home.

791 Plate XII shows a man standing with a sword of the
 shape known as Nândakam. He is an individual called
 a Velichchappâd, and as he stood to be photographed by
 me his forehead and face streamed with blood from a self-
 inflicted wound on the head. The Velichchappâd is a
 771 familiar character in Malabar. His profession illustrates
 the very mixed character of the Hinduism of the Nayar,
 partaking as it does of much of the lower cult,—animism,

2[see cat. 116, plate facing p. 242 -- An.]

and deification of ancestors, worship of snakes and kites, ceremonies connected therewith, sacrifice, magic, witchcraft and sorcery—together with the purest form of Vêdic Brâhmanism known in Southern India, of which there is the highest expression in the temples attached to the wealthy Nambûtiri Illams, to which the Nâyar goes daily to pray, to purify his mind after having purified his body by bathing. There is very little to be seen of prayer in Southern India outside Malabar. The great mass of the people (I exclude the Brâhmans, a very minute percentage of the whole) never dream of going to a temple daily to pray; in fact prayer for its own sake scarcely exists. People go in crowds to a temple on the occasion of a festival to make obeisance to the god, and in a vague way to pray, or they will go to fulfil a vow; but going merely to pray by way of self purification of spirit is certainly rare, for this denotes a phase of religion to which the great mass of the people of Southern India has not reached.

Far away in, as it may be said, rural Malabar, I witnessed the ceremony in which the Velichchappâd exhibited his quality. It was in the courtyard of a Nâyar house, to which thronged all the neighbours (Nâyars), men and pretty women, boys and girls. The ceremony lasts about an hour. The Nâyar said it was the custom in his family to have it done once a year, but could give no account of how the custom had originated: most probably in a vow; some ancestor having vowed that if such or such benefit be received, he will for ever after have an annual performance of this ceremony in his house. It involved some expenditure, as the Velichchappâd had to be paid, and the neighbours had to be fed. Somewhere about the middle of the little courtyard, always as clean as a dinner table, the Velichchappâd placed a lamp (of the Malabar pattern) having a lighted wick, a kalasam, which he had prepared, some flowers, camphor, saffron and other paraphernalia. Bhagavati was the deity invoked, and the business involved offering flowers, and waving a lighted wick around the kalasam. The Velichchappâd's movements became quicker, and suddenly seizing the sword he ran round the courtyard (*against* the sun, as the sailors say) shouting wildly. He is under the influence of the deity who has been induced into him, and he gives oracular utterance to the deity's commands. What he said I know not, and no one else seemed to know or care in the least, much interested though they were in the

months. The last is the day following Siva râtri, the well-known Hindu festival. As it was told to me "Food is offered to the ghosts" on these occasions; to all ancestors, male and female. Food of any kind except cooked rice is offered.* It is cooked and placed in the middle room on the west side of the house, where are kept small images in gold or silver of the senior members of the Taravâd (in poorer houses, a stone simply is put to represent the deceased), and the door will be shut for about ten minutes, after which the food will be removed and eaten by the house people. Special worship of ancestors is often made at the temples specially sacred, on the new moons which have been specified, especially on the last. The plate depicts the crowd in the bed of the Ponnâni river on the day following Siva râtri. Men and women bathed and put on clean cloths and, when they had done so put a little burning camphor, sandalwood powder and some other little accessories, on a leaf which was floated down the river after a brief prayer. The scene of the picture adjoins the temple at Tirunavâyi, supposed to be the oldest in Malabar.

SERPENT WORSHIP.

Description, such as is here attempted, of the Nâyar's religion is incomplete so far. There remains to say something of serpent worship and to make some allusion to common superstitions. For description of these I would refer the interested reader to a capital little book entitled "Malabar and its Folk" published by Messrs. Natesan & Co., Madras, by Mr. T. K. Gopal Panniker, B.A., himself a Nâyar as his name denotes. With this gentleman's permission I will reproduce here chapter 12 of his book entitled "Serpent Worship in Malabar":—

"Malabar is a country which preserves to this day primitive institutions of a type peculiarly fascinating to the ethnologist. Of the various kinds of primitive worship still practised in the country that of the serpent occupies a prominent place. Here the serpent is deified and offerings of pooja are often made to the reptile. It has got a powerful hold upon the popular imagination. Each household has got its own serpent deity possessing large powers for good as well as for evil. A separate spot is set apart in the house-compound as the abode of these deities. This reserved spot is converted into a small jungle almost circular in

* Bread made of rice flour may be offered.

ground is then plastered over with cowdung. Then you mark out with rice flour an eight-cornered chakram, in the centre of which you place a small piece of cadjan leaf, and you place a similar piece at four corners. You sit with your back to the chakram, facing eastwards in the morning and westwards in the evening while performing pûja. This pûja is, I think, addressed to Karinkutti: not in any way to the sun God who is not then visible. For the pûja you must be supplied with fried grain, beaten rice, rice bran, a fowl, toddy, arrack, some flowers of three colours—one of them the tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*)—sandalwood-paste, camphor, incense. (Note the use of the sacred tulsi in this diabolical incantation!) While the pûja, which I am unfortunately unable to describe (leaving my directions rather lame) is being performed the mûla mantram of Karinkutti is to be repeated 101 times. 776
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In order to do all this you must bathe 7½ nazhikas (about 2½ hours) before dawn, and complete the pûja before dawn arrives. But even before this you must stand up to your chest in water and repeat the mûla mantram 101 times. And you must repeat the whole thing *da capo* in the evening. The mantram is thus repeated 404 times in the day. You are not done yet, in fact this is only the beginning. The whole thing is done every day for 21 consecutive days; and then you will have the evil spirit Karinkutti entirely at your disposal. The person who remains continent, eats but once a day, cooking his own food, may it is said bring the spirit into obedience in less than 21 days.

Subjection of Vanni Bhâiravan is a much more difficult matter, involving much more elaborate ceremonial, details of which may well be spared the reader as the example which has been given is quite adequate.

And the good spirits—

Bhagavati.

Bhadra kâli.

Hanumân.

Ganapati.

Subrahmanyan.

Mûkâmî.

Virabhadran.

Môhini.

Sarabha Mûrti.

The evil and the good spirits are truly a strange collection of beings! Their names help to illustrate what has been said already, that the Hinduism of the west coast is a strange medley of the higher Hinduism with the lower cult of the country. Bhâirava or Kâla Bhâirava (Bhâiravan of the Telugu country) is elsewhere the object of adoration of what is almost a distinct cult, a kind of 771
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771 mixture of Hinduism with Buddhism,—the kâpâlîka reli-
 795 gion or cult, the novice in which is "taught how to
 776 worship Bhairi dēvam (Kāla Bhāirava) with human blood,
 by human sacrifice, by drinking liquor from a Brāhman's
 skull, and by wearing wooden earrings called Kāmākshi
 kundala, symbols of the female principle." * The licen-
 tious portion of the programme I will leave out, as we can
 but glance at the Bhāiravan of other parts of Southern
 India. There, Bhāirava, or by whatever equivalent he
 may be called, is a male entity; in Malabar, where sex
 in deities is not of very much moment, Bhāirava is female.
 Bhadra Kālî, and even Vishnu under another name, is
 dragged into the category of evil spirits!

976 The first five of the good spirits are of course, well
 known. It is odd to find the terrible Bhadra Kālî bracket-
 ed with the genial Ganapati and reckoned as a good
 spirit. Some of the others are local spirits though rated
 along with emanations of Hinduism.

789 A point to be noticed here is that the magic which has
 been described is of that kind which is intimately
 connected with religion, in that the aid of spiritual
 beings is sought, and mischief is wrought by their means.

But there is, of course, another side of magic; the sym-
 pathetic, which deals in symbolic hurts and cures; of quite
 another character, being nothing more than a "mis-
 development of natural philosophy."

These divisions of magic, though tolerably distinct,
 are not therefore always separated. They are sometimes
 blended.

212 It was my good fortune, not very long ago, to acquire
 789 possession of a couple of grandhas, or palm leaf books,
 the subject of which is ordinary magic and black magic.
 Like all works of the kind (these are in the Malayalam
 character) they are written in such a manner as to be quite
 unintelligible to the ordinary reader. Letters, symbols,
 syllables belonging to no known word are employed to
 express occult meaning. In fact it is more a memoran-
 dum than anything else. One of the grandhas is so
 obscure that translation of it is next to hopeless, for the
 few who can do so are altogether unwilling to help one
 to decipher it. The other is composed of Sanscrit and
 Malayalam words, spelled abominably; but though rela-
 tively clear for a book out of a "Mantravâdis" (Warlock's
 Magicians) library, it, too, contains many blank spaces
 which can only be filled up by the professional dealer in

FEMALE INITIATION RITES ON THE MALABAR COAST

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royal lineage. The retainer sub-castes disputed for rank and, in their separate villages, held the same rights of administration over the lower castes. In all these sub-castes, including the royal lineage, men were trained from the age of seven as soldiers in village gymnasia headed by military leaders (*Asāna*), and formed a permanent, mobile militia of the kingdom. Below the retainer sub-castes in rank came the small, non-military Nayar servant sub-castes of oil-mongers, funeral-priests, washermen, and barbers.¹ Quite apart from these Brahman and Nayar sub-castes, in a separate area of the village lived the lower patrilineal castes of tenants and menials and the lowest, 'exterior' castes of serfs.

The Nayar Kinship System. The Nayar lineage (*taravadd*) is exogamous and matrilineal kinship terms are extended throughout its range. Its members are united by the observance of fifteen days' ritual pollution at a birth or death, and traditionally by worship of the spirits of dead heads of the lineage, and of a group of totemic snakes. The lineage is divided into small segments, which I call property-groups, each three to five generations deep. Each group is headed by its eldest man (*kāranavan*) who is the legal guardian of its members and controls their property.

The property-group was also until recently the dwelling-group. Residence was, and is still in some houses, uxorilocal: a husband visits his wife after supper and leaves before breakfast. Traditionally, a woman might have any number of lovers of appropriate sub-caste, and a man any number of mistresses. This custom of combined polyandrous and polygynous unions, besides being consistent with a strong matrilineal lineage system, was almost certainly associated with the occupation of Nayar men as soldiers, since it began to die out shortly after the armies were disbanded, about 1810, and a hundred years before the lineage showed signs of disintegration.

The rules of mating were as follows. Sex relations were prohibited within the lineage, and with more than one man or one woman of the same lineage. The Nayar servant sub-castes of oil-mongers, funeral-priests, washermen, and barbers were endogamous, as were all the lower patrilineal castes and the serf-castes. Within the range of military and ruling sub-castes (except for the royal lineages which admitted no peers), all unions were permissible outside the lineage and the range of prohibited affines, and within the sub-caste. Furthermore, these sub-castes were knit together by 'hypergamous' unions between women of lower and men of higher sub-caste. Members of the three retainer sub-castes, which disputed for rank, had only temporary and sporadic sex-relations across sub-caste boundaries. These took place during war when soldiers were permitted to contravene the normal rules against dining with or touching members of other retainer sub-castes and might enter each others' houses in order to eat and sleep. More permanent relationships were encouraged between women of the retainer sub-castes and Kiriyaṭṭil, Sāmantan, royal, or Nambūdiri men; between Kiriyaṭṭil women and Sāmantan, royal, or Nambūdiri men; between Sāmantan women and royal or Nambūdiri men; and between royal women and Nambūdiri men. The royal lineages, acknowledging no others as peers, were obliged to marry all their women upwards and all their men downwards. The Walluvanād and Cochin princesses married Nambūdiri men, the princes Sāmantan, Kiriyaṭṭil, or retainer-women. The Zamorins at first married only some of their women to Nambūdiris, and the rest to men of the more ancient royal lineages of Beypore, Bettem, and Kodungalur, all of whom had been conquered by the Zamorins and made honoured vassals in their kingdom. At some time in the 18th century, the Zamorin's lineage gave up this practice and began to marry its women only to Nambūdiris, while continuing to marry its men to Sāmantan, Kiriyaṭṭil, and retainer-Nayar women.

¹Respectively called Vettukada, Attikurnis (Chidigana in Cochin), Veluthedana, and Vilakkatalavans. The small temple-servant castes who rank between Nambūdiris and Nayars and were also concerned in hypergamous marriages are for lack of space excluded from this discussion.

K. M. PANIKKAR.—*Some Aspects of Nayar Life.*

277

with all kind of sports.¹ The family, which is supposed to have been in mourning during the whole period, goes back to its normal life.

M. Van Gennep considers the state of mourning as "Un état de marge pour les survivants, dans lequel ils entrent des rites de séparation, et d'où ils sortent par des rites de réintégration dans la société générale (rites de levée du deuil)."² With regard to the first fourteen days in particular, a Nayar family in mourning constitutes a special society. During this period, and to a certain extent to the period till the final rites (forty-one days, or one year) social life is suspended. The ceremony at the end of the year is then a *rite de réintégration*.

VI.—RELIGION AND MAGIC AMONG THE NAYARS.

The religious beliefs of the Nayars show an extraordinary mixture of Hindu and Dravidian cults. All the temples are dedicated to Krishna, Siva, or Karttavyani. There are also a few *kavus*, or groves, for the worship of the lesser Hindu deities. But the important point with regard to this is that the Nayars are, as a whole, a people almost without a religion,³ and they use Hindu temples for practices which receive no sanction even in the generous vagueness of that creed. The religious conceptions of Hinduism have but the slightest influence on the Nayar community as a whole. It is quite true that there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nayars, but the very fact that the distinction of Saiva-ism, Sakti-ism, Vaishnava-ism, etc., have not reached them, is sufficient proof that, though they have been Hinduised in form and have belonged to the Hindu fold, their primitive beliefs have survived to a great extent.

Nothing shows so much the extreme persistence of primitive culture, even in the face of higher civilising agencies, than the wide and almost universal acceptance of spirit-worship, and the almost entire absence of religious life among the Nayars after at least twenty centuries of contact with Hinduism. Their contact with religion has not been limited indeed to Hinduism. The Jews, flying after the destruction of their Temple, found refuge among the Nayars, and have lived in their midst for nigh two thousand years. The Apostle St. Thomas is supposed to have planted a community of Syrian Christians among them, who also have lived side by side with the Nayars as their social inferiors in Malabar for almost the same length of time. Ever since Mohamed founded his religion in Arabia, Allah has found faithful worshippers in Malabar who moved with equal status among the Nayar population. The beautiful creed of Gautama Buddha had for long its devout votaries in the land of the Nayars, and traces of Buddhist monasteries and survivals of Buddhist worship still

¹ There is a story about a poet who enjoyed this celebration very much and said to the master of the house, "I hope there will be one like this here every year."

² *Rites de Passage*, p. 211.

³ See the discussion following.

771
177 about. The militant Romanism of the Holy Inquisition, and the no less militant Protestantism of the Dutch, had their chance, in turn, for at least a century and a half. Yet, with all the great religions of the world to choose between during the last two thousand years, it is nothing short of marvellous to see the Nāyara, who have, it must be remembered, assimilated a very great deal of the material and intellectual culture of their neighbours, and, more than that, excelled them in literature and music, still maintain with undiminished vigour their spirit-worship, black-magic, and demoniacal ceremonies, and are devoid of almost every element of true religious life.

771 We may be accused of the narrow use of a wide word in the phraseology of Tylor when we deny that the Nāyara have any religion apart from a veneer of Hindu influence. Their beliefs are mainly magical. Here, of course, I am treading on very dangerous ground, dangerous even to the initiated, but fatal to the novice. In this essay I have taken the distinction between religion and magic as being primarily a question of method rather than of intention or possible effect. The orthodox French opinion that the difference between magic and religion is that the latter is social while the former is anti-social, has been proved by Mr. E. S. Hartland and Dr. Marett to be wholly untenable; while the contention of Dr. Marett himself¹ is that the difference between magic and religion lies in the attitude of society towards them.²

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114 Among the Nāyara there is an implicit distinction between practices to propitiate a god and those with which to bully a spirit. Bullying a spirit for purposes of social benefit I have not considered to be religion, though it is recognised by society as beneficial and therefore according to Dr. Marett should be considered as religious—because it does not possess the emotional and the psychological elements which

¹ *Anthropology*, p. 210 (Home Univ. Series).

² Dr. Marett has recently expressed his view thus:—

"The dominant social tradition tolerates in a community only certain practices and the beliefs associated with them. These may be said to constitute the religion of the community. It does not matter whether they embody customs such as sacrifice and prayer which are essential to the civilised man's notion of his religion, or whether they involve processes of sympathetic magic, etc., such as have for us become disreputable.

"On the other hand, when resort is had to the supernaturalistic means in order to gain selfish and anti-social ends we may speak of magic." (Class Lecture on Primitive Morals.)

Here Dr. Marett seems to go back to the French view and hold that the difference between magic and religion is that the former is selfish and anti-social while the latter is disinterested and social. The view here submitted is different. It is submitted that primitive society understands the difference between magical and religious customs even when both are essentially social and disinterested. To the primitive mind, the difference between religion and magic lies in the method and procedure of the ceremonies, or, as we shall now call them, the ritual. As method and procedure only reflect the mental state of the performer and the society to the benefit of which these ceremonies are performed, this difference is essentially psychological. This position is better explained by the Nāyara customs and beliefs noted below.

K. M. PANIKKAR.—*Some Aspects of Nāyar Life.*

279

Dr. Marett himself has, with great truth, insisted on as the essence of religion.¹ I have called such practices magical, not only because they lack the emotional and the psychological elements of religion, but also because the fundamental presupposition in such performances is the power wielded by the magician, the "orenda" which he has acquired, over the ghosts.

This is very clear from the Nāyar ideas of *Thēvar* and *Pisāchu*. *Thēvar* can be propitiated but never conquered; while a *Pisāchu* (or ghost), though superior to man in power, intelligence and will-to-do-harm, can be rendered harmless and kept under control by magical practices. The former conception is clearly Hindu and relates only to Hindu gods. The spiritual ideas of the Nāyars themselves seem to be confined to ghosts, spirits, and to a comic elf called *Kutti-Chāttan*.

Before we proceed to consider them, the position of the magician in the Nāyar community has to be made clear. It is generally taken for granted by anthropological writers that wherever social life is regulated by magical practices the *Shaman* comes to be held in reverence. It is very interesting, therefore, to notice that the Nāyars never accepted the superiority of the magician, and never accorded him any privilege. The magico-medicine man is, on the other hand, considered to be a sort of servant-in-attendance on a nobleman's family, something like a family doctor. The explanation that it is due to the warlike character of the Nāyars is clearly inapplicable, as the magician attained kingly powers among the Masai, for example, whose society is also organised for purposes of war. The fact that the *Kāniyān* (or the magico-medicine-man) is not only not venerated, but actually considered an inferior, may be more due to the effect of caste-system, which places Nāyars high among the social scale.

The *Kāniyān* is, of course, recognised as a necessary person. He gets from all the houses of the village settled remuneration, mostly in coco-nuts. He is not otherwise paid for ordinary consultation, and he is bound to attend to every case in the village without fail. For special exertions of his magical powers he has special payments settled by village custom. He has power, both inherited and acquired, to cast-off spirits, to perform preventive magic, and keep general control over ghosts.

There are supposed to be three kinds of spirits, *Prētām*, *Bhutām*, and *Pisāchu*. A *Prētām* is the spirit of a dead man. The ghosts of men who died in the ordinary course of events are not really *Prētāms*, because they do not wander about to overpower people and drink their blood. It is generally the ghosts of men who died as a result of foul play, or by accidents such as drowning, or by terrible diseases such as smallpox and cholera that wander about at nights. A *Bhutām* is seen generally in marshy districts and does not always hurt people unless they go very near him. A *Pisāchu* is a general spirit of the air causing such diseases as smallpox. All these

¹ Threshold of Religion: Essays on Pre-animistic Religion, the Birth of Humility, and is Tabu negative magic?

776 high above his reach unless, of course, there is something near by on which he could climb. He cannot untie a knot, as he does not possess fingers, though he can open the strongest lock. What rich people do to keep their money out of his reach is to tie a knot on the purse and keep it locked in a safe, the latter precaution being necessary against human hands that possess fingers.

776 *Kutti Chattan* can, of course, be tamed by magicians and bribed to do whatever
791 his patrons like. There is a story that a Brahmin landlord who was also a magician
773 tamed a *Kutti Chattan* and used him for the purpose of keeping a watch on his things. A Christian tenant of his who had gone to pay the rent, not knowing the existence of the invisible and mysterious detective, stole certain things and took them home with him. But lo! *Kutti Chattan* had followed him, and the man was found dead next morning, and the stolen things were in their place. Such is the power of *Kutti Chattan*, the household elf of Malabar.

● 771 Whether the practices here narrated and the belief in the existence of a "naughty elf" amount to religion depends very much upon the definition we give to it. Though they are distinctly social and possess social sanction, I do not think it can be called religion, because there is a fundamental difference in the emotional and psychic aspects of religious experience and practice, and such social beliefs and customs as I have described here.

754 But side by side with this there also exists "black magic," sinister, selfish, and
771 anti-social. It is fast disappearing, more as a result of economic pressure than be-
[178] cause of any growing disbelief in it. A young man has no time now to devote him-
[989] self entirely to sacrificing goats and birds all night and chanting formulæ so that he might become possessed of magical power. Those young men who have devoted themselves to such practices are, however, looked upon with great fear. The community does not like such practices, and though these magicians may excite fear, they are also aware of the general belief that they will some day come to a disastrous end.

Their practices are carried on in secret and nobody knows what they do except those initiated. Their assistance is procured only by people who want to do harm to others or satisfy ignoble desires. A man often gets the help of a magician of this sort to perform his "art" so that an enemy of his who is gone on a pilgrimage may not return. They are avoided by all decent people, and society in general, though it fears their "art," considers them charlatans.

754 There are many minor superstitions that can be only briefly noticed here.

784 *The Evil Eye.*—The magical effect of the evil eye is a matter of very serious
123 concern among Nāyar women. I remember being taken to task for telling a woman how healthy her boy looked, and must add that I felt as if I had been convicted of a heinous crime when four or five days later I was told that the child was ill. The
[755] entire feminine opinion of the village was convinced that the child was suffering from my evil eye, and a good many *mantrams*, or magical formulæ, were said over it before the child was well again.

rhyme, and I must say that I never knew anyone who took an oil bath on a Thursday, except people who take it every day.

The tabus extend to the way in which you sleep. You are not supposed to sleep with your body north to south or west to east. The reason, I believe, is that the spirits of the dead are supposed to live in the south and in the east, and if you lie with your head facing them you might become possessed of them.

There are certain days of the lunar month on which no one may start on a journey :

Yama Rudrahi Muppōram
Trkella ira izhu Naal
Vinakkil viliyā Bhāmi
Pōkunnakil aram enni.

On the seven days presided over by the seven stars thus enumerated, if a land is sowed no seed will sprout, if anyone starts on a journey he will not return.

I remember a curious story connected with this. Some four months before leaving for England I had to see the Inspector of Schools in Travancore to get my Leaving Certificate. The only day available for me was one of these tabu days, and in spite of the protests of everybody else in the house, I set out on my business. When I reached the capital of the state the Inspector of Schools had left on circuit an hour before to the place where I started from. I followed him there, but when I arrived he had left the place, and, as a result of continuous journeying and bad food, I was laid up in bed through a physical breakdown. It was true that if I had not started on that tabu day, but had had the patience to wait for another twenty-four hours the Inspector of Schools would have come to the town where I was living ; it was also true that I came back very ill. Everyone, therefore, took it for granted that all this ill-luck was due to my starting on a bad day. Many are the stories that are told of people suffering great misfortunes due to starting on these bad days, and there is, as M. Reinach would say, "a vast oral tradition of leading cases" connected with it. I daresay my case will go down as a most authentic one, as the facts are undoubtedly true ; only the explanation is doubtful.

Tabus like this can be mentioned without end ; but it is useless to do so, as they all seem to have the same "rationale" : that is, you will break your peace with the world of demons and ghosts that surround you and bring down upon yourself their wrath if you break any one of these rules. Tabu among the Nāyars is essentially an arrangement to keep the ghosts and spirits pacified : for it is clear to them from the tested experience of past ages that to break any of these rules is to challenge those who have power to do them great harm.

In whatever is said here, it should be understood that I have tried to eliminate from the Nāyar beliefs those elements which are indubitably Hindu. As I have pointed out at the start, there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nāyars, but it is an interesting fact that the practices and beliefs above described are pre-

K. M. PANIKKAR.— *Some Aspects of Nāyar Life.*

285

valent among them also. The more one looks into these matters the more one becomes clear that in the unorganised and uneducated human mind, be it "civilised" or be it primitive, there is a horizontal stratification of the most contradictory ideas, which lie absolutely undisturbed in the ordinary course of life. In the mind of the ordinary man whose *forte* is not clear thinking, a great deal of intermingling of such ideas might take place. It is no uncommon sight to see a thoroughly Hinduised Nāyar who talks about Absolutism and Illusion, and believes in them, paying a *Kāniyān* to get the devil out of his little niece. This is, perhaps, the truth which lies midway between those who assert, like Dr. Frazer, that magic and religion are hostile and cannot be reconciled, and those who, like Dr. Marett, hold that in their origin they are the same, that it is in their character as looked upon by society they differ. The view I have maintained here is that religion and magic are different in their psychological and emotional effects and that Dr. Frazer is right when he says that they are at bottom hostile. But the almost universal coexistence of magic and religion is due to the attitude of society which tolerates all contradictions and insists only on their effect being for social welfare.

VII.—THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE NĀYARS.

Occupation.—The Nāyars are at present an essentially agricultural population. The vast majority of them are peasant proprietors owning small farms. Rice and coco-nuts are the chief things cultivated, though in North Malabar pepper and cardoman have also their share.

With regard to these matters the Nāyars have attained a certain stage of excellence. Their coco-nut estates are planted with a considerable amount of scientific skill and they are proficient in the industries which are allied to coco-nut cultivation; such as coir-matting, copra making and extraction of coco-nut oil. The extreme fertility of the land has made agricultural chemistry, as far as coco-nut and rice cultivation are concerned, a matter of secondary importance; and even to-day there are very few Nāyars who have studied the Western methods of agriculture.

As each Nāyar family generally lives in a compound of its own, coco-nut cultivation is generally in small farms. Extensive coco-nut plantations owned by the same man are very few. The position is much like that in England before the Enclosures. Even if all the land in a particular area is owned by the same person it is seldom enclosed and transformed into one large estate. On the other hand, they continue to be regarded as separate compounds and the houses on them are generally occupied either by Nāyar tenants or by Pulaya slaves.

The fact that Nāyar families live in garden houses is one of great significance. Horticulture is practised with great interest in all families, rich as well as poor. It is, in fact, very seldom that any Nāyar family uses vegetables bought from the market.

101 is from the Sanskrit word *Nayaka*, meaning leader. As such a derivation flatters the national vanity of the community it has been accepted without question. The utter absurdity of the idea that the people who call themselves Aryans (as the Brahmins of Malabar still do) and look down upon the rest from a point of view of racial superiority, can have given them this proud title, never seems to have suggested itself. Moreover, the Aryan settlers of Malabar asserted a spiritual as well as temporal superiority over the Nāyars, which goes far to disprove the theory of the derivation of the word from *Nayaka*, or Lord.

It seems unquestionable, on the other hand, that the word *Nāyar* is the same as 101 *Nagar*. As the totem names seem to have been imposed on the community from 614 outside it seems reasonable to suppose that this serpent-worshipping people were 174 called by their neighbours *Nagar* or serpent-men. That the Nāyars in ancient days 225 were a totemic clan, is easy to see from the fact that every Nāyar family still 771 holds the serpent sacred. Thus it will not cut down a *Kagu*, or serpent grove, as it is the place where the family serpents reside. It is, of course, natural that in a [61] community of 3½ million souls the same solidarity of totemic feeling, as it exists, say, among the turtle clan, cannot have existed.

M. S. Reinach, in defining totemism as distinct from fetishism, says that the totem is a class of objects regarded by a tribe or clan as tutelary or protective in the widest sense of the word. Take the case of a clan with a serpent totem; the members will call themselves serpents, claim descent from a serpent, abstain from killing serpents, etc. Not only do the Nāyars still show traces of having done all this, but they continue to perform with undiminished zeal *Nagathān* (*thān* is an honorific suffix) *puṭṭas*, or prayers and songs, to the sacred serpents. When anything goes wrong the astrologer generally finds something done to offend the sacred serpents. [784] There is one singular case where a man, without heeding the warnings of all his people, went and cleared a serpent grove, and the result was that he died six days later. In popular opinion, this was without doubt due to the wrath of the serpents.

101 From all this it seems quite clear that before the Aryan invasion the Nāyars 174 were a community with a *Naga* or serpent totem. This is supported by evidence from Ceylon also. Ceylon chronicles mention that when the Buddha visited the island for the second time (second century B.C.) he found the northern part peopled by Nagas who were fighting with the Yakshas, or the original inhabitants of the land.¹ This is without doubt an emigration of S. Indian people to Ceylon, probably as a result of Aryan pressure from the North. The descendants of these Nagas of Ceylon, it must be noticed, bear a close similarity to the Nāyars in matters of social life. Among their customs may be specially noticed: (a) the elasticity or rather the slenderness of the marriage tie which permits the discarding, without any disgrace attached to it, of undesirable husbands or wives; (b) the remarriage of such widows

¹ See Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*. London, 1900, p. 16.

[P. 80]

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUDRAS OF COCHIN.

A. THE HIGH CASTE SUDRAS (NAYARS)

(Continued).

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Religion.

The high caste Nayars profess Hinduism and follow most of the religious practices of the Brahmans whose influence in matters religious as well as social is supreme all over the State. They worship the superior deities of the Hindu pantheon (Siva, Vishnu, and their consorts, as also Ganapati) in *ambalams* or *kshetrams* (temples) of which there are in the State many that have long been in existence. Everywhere in the State, the caste-men and women with their children may be seen going to worship the deities in their local temples both morning and evening after their baths in the public tanks. It is only after this worship that they take their meals, and seldom do they depart from this rule. They also adore the minor deities, namely, Subramanian, Ayyappan, Sástha or Vettakkorumakan, Bhagavati, as well as Kali, the goddess of small-pox, and malignant demons, such as, Kutticháttan, Mundian, Gulikan, Gantákaranan. But these deities or demons are located in *kivus*, mere unpretentious structures with the characteristic tiled roofs and ornamental gables. These deities are represented by carved or uncarved pieces of stone placed on elevated seats beneath the *ál* (*Ficus religiosa*), the *pala* (*Echites scholaris*), or the *kánniram* (*strychnos*), and the priest is usually a non-Vedic Namburi, an Elayad, a Músad, or one of the Sudra castes. The deities such as Subramanian and others above mentioned, are the sons of Siva, and require no animal sacrifices, but the host of demons require to be propitiated with offerings of goats, or fowls, while their wishes are often interpreted by oracles, who are known as *velichapads*.

The Cochin State, as well as Malabar and Travancore, is the land of magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, and as well as

belief in animism, and all these are largely mixed up with the religion of the Nayars. Animism refers to the belief that man passes through life surrounded by a ghastly company of powers, elements, and tendencies, impersonal in character, mere shapeless phantoms of which no image can be made and no idea can be formed. Most of these have departments or spheres of influence of their own—one presides over cholera, another over small-pox, yet another over cattle disease, some dwell in rocks, others haunt trees, and others again haunt rivers, whirlpools and waterfalls. All of them require to be diligently propitiated by reason of the ills and calamities which they bring about, and the essence of these practices is magic. [564 771 776 782]

Evidence of a wide-spread belief in the worship of ancestors is to be seen in the kistavens (*thoppi kallus*)—the rock caves containing the sepulchral urns found in the jungles and other parts of the State—in the ceremonies performed and the offerings made for the spirits of the dead. They are worshipped even now in special *kávus*, sometimes even in small out-houses or special rooms in the house on new moon days or *Sankrāntis*, and there are also periodical commemorations on the anniversaries of the ancestor's death. Dead ancestors are also represented by stones or small images of gold or silver kept in the middle room of the Nayar houses, and offerings of food and drink are made to them on new moon and *Sankrānti* nights. Animistic again is the worship of Káli or Bhagavati who presides over small-pox, cholera, and the thousand maladies that flesh is heir to, the worship of animals and plants and lastly the belief in exorcism and witchcraft in which Brahmans also share. [769 532 771 776 789 754]

Serpent shrines (*Nágattán kávu*s or *Nagakóttan*) are to be found in the compounds of every Nayar house in the Cochin State, and their worship occupies a prominent place in the religious life of the Nayars and other castes. The following mythical origin is ascribed to the adoration of serpents in the Keralólpathi. [771 778 825]

The first Aryan colonists settled by Parasurama found Kerala absolutely uninhabitable, and finding it impossible to improve their condition, returned to their old country. After their departure, the *Nágas* (or serpent gods) of the lower world or *Páthala* took possession of the partly reclaimed land and settled [773 778 825 776]

773 thereon. The early colonists, on a second venture, finding
 778 the land occupied, commenced a war against the Nāgas, but
 825 Parasurama acting as arbitrator, decided in favour of the
 [776] early colonists, and ordered that they should set apart a corner
 of every compound as an abode of the serpent gods. He further
 ordained that these allotted places were to remain virgin-
 ground, untouched by the blade of the knife or the prong of
 the fork, while the under-wood and the creepers were to be
 allowed to grow in wild profusion, and to such the name
 778 *kivvu* (grove) was given. In it are generally planted several
 stone idols of serpents placed on a stone-basement called
 771 *chitrakūdam*, the whole being held sacred and reserved by a
 825 low wall round it to prevent cattle or children straying into
 [782] that space. The propitiation of serpents is deemed essential
 [753] to the prosperity and well-being of every house-holder, and
 [776] periodical offerings are made to them, while the neglect of
 these is considered to cause leprosy, sterility, or ophthalmia,
 among the members of the family. These serpents are there-
 fore regarded as tutelary deities of the family, and the gods
 along with the shrines are conveyed with the property and
 frequently specified in deeds of transfer.

793 The high priest of the serpent cult is the Pāmbu Mékkát
 795 Nambuthiri, who lives in a house full of cobras which are said
 778 to be harmless to his family. Whenever an image of a serpent
 825 from a grove has to be removed from one place to another, he
 [782] is sent for on the belief that he alone can do it after due pro-
 pitiation and offerings, and any tree that is cut down for this
 removal must be sent to the local temple to be used as fuel.
 [564] The serpent grove should not be polluted by a member of the
 [841] low caste, or by a woman during her menses; and when it is
 [783] so polluted or otherwise spoiled, a member of the family of
 the Nambuthiri priest has to be informed. He gazes into a
 [787] vessel filled with oil, points out the evil and suggests the remedy.
 771 The ninth asterism in every month is specially selected for
 778 snake worship in Nayar families, when offerings of milk and
 825 water are made to them. It is said that the approach of a
 841 woman during her menses will cause serpents to vacate the
 [782] grove because of the impurity, and Pulluvans are required to
 [532] sing songs and perform certain ceremonies to cause them to
 re-enter the shrines. Images of these serpents are sometimes

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attracts a very large number of pilgrims during the *Mandala puja* from Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. This deity is peculiar to these parts, where he has the largest number of worshippers.¹

The worship of the tutelary deities above described is to a very great extent the outcome of a belief in, and a constant fear of, the influence of demons and evil spirits on mankind, a belief which has existed from a very remote period. The worship of demons is confined to the lower orders and has no connection with the higher forms of Hinduism, and yet this belief in demons is so wide-spread that not even the Brahmins are free from it. In every part of the State, in Malabar and in Travancore, magicians and sorcerers, from the highest Nambuthiri to the lowest Parayan, find employment in exorcising their baneful influences. Among the Pánans, Mannáns and Parayáns, magic, sorcery, and witchcraft are a hereditary profession, and among the Nambuthiripáds of Kallúr, Káttumatam, and Chennamangalam are to be found special family deities by whose aid they are supposed to avert the actions of demons and spirits. It is curious to note that there are exorcists even among Christians and Mussalmans; and another interesting fact in connection with this is that the high caste Hindus exercise their magic influence by propitiating, by the aid of their sacred *mantras*, the more refined and sublime manifestations of God, while the low caste-men propitiate Káli in her more hideous aspects. The ordinary people make a distinction between *Bhútas* on the one hand, and *Prélas* and *Pisáchas* on the other. The former are regarded as the messenger of Siva and his consort Sakti, while the latter are the souls of the departed who have died a violent and unnatural death by suicide, murder, or by drowning, and they are believed to be demons who wander about inflicting injury upon mankind in various ways. At noon and at midnight are the chief hours when they attempt to seize or possess those who walk in lonely places or take shelter under tamarind trees or on the sides of tanks. At night the demons are believed to call loudly in order to allure people out of their homes into distant jungles and there to kill them; hence, as a rule, at night a call is not responded to until it is repeated a fourth

1. Vide Religion of the Ishuvana, Vol. I, page 313.

775 time. At the period of puberty and after child-birth women
 881 are especially liable to the attacks of these aerial beings.
 846 Charms and incantations, offerings and sacrifices, are the most
 789 requisite to counteract the evils that demons do, and iron
 782 rings, iron staffs, and leather shoes, are some of the specifics
 that help to keep the demons at a distance.

787 They make their abode chiefly in the palmyra and *pala*
 trees, but some of them occupy even dwelling houses. Others
 take the shape of human beings, while yet others possess
 human beings.

775 Their name is legion, and they exist by the offerings of
 782 their votaries and their tormented victims. Against the machi-
 776 nations of these demons, the sorcerers and exorcists bring to
 791 bear the influence of their special guardian deities who in turn
 must be propitiated with offerings before they can be called
 upon to use their beneficial strength. In the case of the evil
 783 spirit of him who has died an unnatural death, a Brahman
 magician purifies the spirit by means of certain ceremonies
 called *Tilahoma* (an offering of sesamum seeds to *agni* or fire).
 789 A Chendus Nambuthiri presides at such ceremonies and trans-
 fers the spirit to an image of gold, silver, or wood which is
 afterwards placed in a Vishnu temple or enshrined in a small
 building put up for that purpose, there to rest in peace.

771 In the State, temples are dedicated to various demons,
 346 the chief among them being the *Avanangattil Chattan* in
 775 Triprayar. The temples dedicated to the small-pox demon
 753 correspond to the *Péy Kovils* or devil temples of the Tamil
 796 Districts. In these temples are to be found the instruments
 and symbols of demon worship, the dancing sticks or wands,
 the priests' garments, tridents, etc., whilst in others there is
 nothing save the images of demons. There is also an officiat-
 793 ing priest, who is the devil driver and the devil dancer, and
 791 who at times even becomes a *Velichapad* inspired to communi-
 cate to the votaries, who consult him in times of illness and
 calamity, the wishes and intentions of that particular demon.

771 To a Hindu all organic life is sacred, and his creed is
 225 not to injure any living thing, while among
 the animals worshipped by him the cow occu-
 pies the first place. The cow is *Kdmadhenu*, the giver of all
 things, and hence whenever a cow is approached, it is touched

CHAP. IV.]

The Nayars

87.

with the hand which is, in token of veneration, then raised to the head. Milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung are mixed together and used for purificatory ceremonies; and the images of gods are anointed with this holy mixture called *panchagavyam*. Small doses of it are even taken internally, and it is considered an antidote against poison, besides being prescribed as a *prāyāchit* or expiation for offences against caste, whereas the sprinkling of water mixed with dung removes sin or pollution from all persons, places, or things, and purifies them. The bull, the vehicle of Siva, is also held sacred, and a statue of it in granite is either placed in front of the image of Siva or in a separate shrine; and is worshipped as a God. The lizard associated with Siva, the monkey with Hanumān, the Garuda (the brahmany kite) with Vishnu, and the peacock of Subramania are a few of the other animals of Hindu veneration.

Of the birds of ill omen, one species of owl called *pullu* is much dreaded because of the belief that it causes an illness to children which results in emaciation. At the sound of its screeching, children are taken into a room to avoid its injurious gaze. Various are the propitiatory ceremonies performed by specialists to secure its good-will and to prevent its doing harm to babies; and amulets are worn by children as a preventive against its evil influences. Its hideous screeches are always associated with death.

Among trees, some are worshipped while others are used for *pūjas* or sacrifices. Among the former may be mentioned the pipal (*Ficus religiosa*), a tree which is held in veneration by the Hindus. Persons afflicted with maladies or whose planets are unfavourable, go round a pipal tree, seven, twelve, forty-one, or one hundred and eight times, muttering prayers and burning camphor and other incense at its foot or perchance engage Brahmins to do so, in the belief, that it will cure disease or counteract evil influences. The *vīṭa* (*Egle marmelos*), whose leaf of triple form is supposed to represent the three eyes of Siva, and symbolise his triple function of production, destruction, and re-production, and the *tulasi* (*Ocymum sanctum*), which is sacred to Vishnu, are also worshipped. In front of every house, generally on the eastern side, or in the central yard of a quadrangular structure, is a stone or mud altar, on which *tulasi* or the *vīṭa* is planted and watered every day, and is worshipped by the inmates of the house. From

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771 From
824 the *tulsi* are also made rosaries, which, in addition to being
778 an aid to prayers, are also used as ornaments for the neck.
301 Among the trees used for *pūjan* or sacrifices are the sandal-
782 wood, the *pāṇi* (*Butea frondosa*), the *rudrikaham* (*Elaeo-*
carpus lanceolatus), the *darbha* (*Poa cynosuroides*), the *karika*
(*Agrostis linearis*), the *thumba* (*Leucas Indica*), *chembarutti*
(shoe-flower, *Hibiscus Rosa sinensis*), *erikku* (*Calotropis gigan-*
(278) tea), *thechi* (*Chrysanthemum*), and the several species of lotus
and jessamine; and of these one and all are extensively used
for medicinal purposes.

77 The belief in demons and the habit of attributing all that
538 *Folk-tales.* cannot be easily accounted for to supernatural
powers, have built up an edifice of folk-tales
that would prove of great interest to students of folk-lore, some
of which are given below:—

539
[821] The eclipse is ascribed to the devouring of the sun or
moon by the huge serpent *Rāhu*, and while it lasts, a kind of
pollution is observed by the people, for during the period of
eclipse, food and drink are supposed to acquire poisonous pro-
perties.

[775] People who hear stories of *Rāmāyana*, while lying on
their beds, will become blades of grass in their next birth.

[821] Will-o'-the-wisps are accounted for, as lights emitted by a
[825] kind of precious stone (*mānikka kattu*) from the mouths of
[823] serpents, which, owing to their long life, are believed to have
acquired the art of flying. Popular belief is that some serpents
have been blowing for ages upon gold, embedded in the strata
of the earth, and converting it into precious stones of the
nature above mentioned. They keep them in their mouths,
and acquire the power of flying in the air, with the stones
shining brilliantly when they open their mouths.

825
539 When the crow and the fowl were first created, they were
asked which they preferred, personal beauty or long life. The
fowl preferred the former, and the crow the latter. Hence it
is that the crow is said to possess a long lease of life.

The crow is supposed to possess only one eye, though ap-
parently it has two. One eye-ball is said to move first in one
socket, then into the other as necessity requires. The story is
connected with a strange myth.

464 The Nayars are the second in the list of the castes as
564 regards learning, and only five per cent. of the population be-
[212] long to the learned professions, but they are found in all
departments of public service. The community is now avail-
ing itself largely of the benefits of modern education, and the
members are fast becoming conspicuous in every walk of life.
In every department of the State, in all the learned profes-
sions, they form a respectable majority, and the only people
who successfully compete with them are the Brahman immi-
grants from the other coast. Though there are extensive land-
holders and substantial farmers among them, a very large
majority of the caste-men are really very poor, being either
petty farmers, agricultural labourers or day labourers, earning
[357] wages at the rate of four to five annas a day. Even women of
the poorer classes do agricultural work. Domestic servants in
Hindu families are almost wholly Nayars, but none of them
are artisans, weavers or potters.

264 The Nayars seldom eat before their bath or before worship-
[515] ping in the temple close at hand. Their meals
[771] Food. are generally three in number, namely, breakfast
which is taken early in the morning, a midday meal between
eleven and twelve, and another between seven and eight in the
evening, but this meal is generally taken by children between
262 five and six. The breakfast usually consists of *kanji* or rice
264 gruel with some pickles and *pappadam* (round wafers made of
the meal of the kidney-bean). Coffee is becoming popular
[272] among the Nayars, and this beverage is now often taken for
[556] breakfast in well-to-do families. They do not recognize any
danger in the use of it, and individuals of all ages indulge in it,
so much so that it is even given to young infants. The mid-
day meal, which is usually served between eleven and twelve
o'clock, consists of boiled rice together with a few vegetable
curries; and butter-milk mixed with rice is the last course.

Their supper which usually consists of similar preparation
[562] is taken between seven and eight at night. The women take
their food after the male members of the family. Only a mi-
nority of Nayars are strict vegetarians, though there is no
prohibition against their eating meat, fish or fowl.

252 In large aristocratic families, Brahman cooks are engaged
556 to prepare the meals, but the serving is in some cases done by
[357] the members. In other families, on the contrary, the cooks of

853 could see, was obviously a way of circumventing the difficulty of adequate nourishment, something to which a great majority of the mothers in the vast multitudes of Asia habitually resort.

*595 [868] [226] Father Korappan was away working, and he had taken twelve year old Krishna with him as an apprentice, so I was not able to photograph the whole family. But I obtained a picture of Sita with Kumaran at her breast and Chami and Narayan sitting next to her, which I give here in Fig. 15. The genealogy is in Table 18.

564 [614] [428] Where *tarawads* were not known, Sita gave me the name of the village. From what she told me, the clans were patrilineal, inheritance was *makkathayam*, and exogamy was the rule, also in the *kiriyanis*. Her husband's matrilineal descent group was called Walleananad. The house was leased as a *kudiyiruppu* for which they paid a yearly rent of twelve annas to the *janmi*, Eranur Mana Narayan Nambudripad. They had been fifteen years at this place, and had come from about a furlong away where they used to reside before. This awakened my curiosity, and I enquired how this had happened.

Sita told me that her husbands originally lived in the other house, because it was the *tarawad's* headquarters. The name Kundilpadam which it bore meant "low field", and Vellarkaden which was the name of their present house, was just the appellation by which their new dwelling was known. Her husbands' father was the youngest of a pair of brothers, and they had both taken wives to themselves and had not lived in polyandry. Their offspring, her husbands and their father's elder brother's children, had continued to live together, and they, Panju and Korappan, had married first, twenty seven years ago. Then, twelve years later, the cousins had also got married, and, in order to make place for them, Sita and her surviving husband, Korappan, being the junior members, had moved away to another residence, the one where they lived at present.

[60] I made the genealogy of the neighbouring household as the informant gave it to me. It is shown here in Table 19. Two brothers, Panju and Raman, respectively aged forty six and forty, lived polyandrously with a common wife called Cherona, thirty three years old. They had four children, of whom none were married, since they were still too young.

361 On the 21st of November, 1949, I went to Palarmannalam, a cluster of houses on the road between Ottappalam and the Lakkidi railway station, about a mile before the latter is reached. The object of our visit was to see a *Pullavan* household, that is of herbalists and nag snake worshippers, a sub-caste associated to the artisans.

[TEXT CONTINUES ON P. 214]

178 were farmers who owned vast extents of lands, which were cultivated by means of their own capital and stock. These families yet survive, but have scattered hovels to live in and are reduced to the rank of landless cultivators, entirely dependent on the landlords for subsistence.

000 There is however ample scope for economic improvement if some of the standing evils be removed. First of all must come education and enlightenment among the masses, for which nothing short of free and compulsory education can be of help in view of the poverty and the rank apathy of the people. A law must regulate the relations of the jenmi and kudiyan (tenant) which would deal successfully with the problem of oppression of the weak by the strong, and the absolute economic and social servility of the one to the other. Agriculture must be improved and co-operation stimulated. The indebted classes must gradually be liberated from the coils of the money-lenders and landlords, either by means of loans on nominal interest or otherwise. The public must be educated in the modern developments of agricultural science as well by example as by precept. They must also be initiated into the advantages of co-operation and mutual help. The operations of the savings banks, assurance societies, agricultural loans, etc., must be brought into more intimate reach of the ryot. Deeper and more wells should be dug and irrigation works also introduced. Roads and other public ways must be opened into the hearts of these sequestered areas. Boys and girls must be educated and trained to be good industrious men and citizens. In short, a strong movement must be started to awaken the people from apathy into activity, from thralldom into self-help and self-reliance, from illiteracy into enlightenment.

For all these, none but the landlords can take the best initiative. Therefore education must first of all be given to them. Now they belong to a class which is the most conservative, the most dominant, the richest and the most oppressive in Malabar. By education, they must be brought round to a sense of justice, brotherhood and philanthropy. They are orthodox religionists who spend days and nights in ceremonials and chanting of vedic lore. But they do not know what their chants mean and do this because their forefathers did so. This cannot make men cultured and helpful to society.

[11] These are some of the reforms that have to be undertaken and some of these have to come from the people themselves, but there are others which the Government alone can deal with effectively.

121 are perpetuated as indices of status—to the extent, indeed, that with
 551 the matrilineal Thangal group, who also claim patrilineal descent
 from the Prophet, an elaborate combination of patronymics and
 matronymics has been developed (1959, p. 501).

CONCLUSION

121 In view of the great number of communities that have remained
 171 untouched, the evidence considered in detail may seem to offer only a
 very narrow theoretical base. This is not so. We have attempted to
 show that the general structural model may be connected to a great
 variety of descent patterns. Only a few cases would be sufficient to
 demonstrate the point. We have found many more. We have also
 noted the interesting balance in the customary recognition given to
 the formal claims of the paternal and maternal relatives upon the
 children of the marriage. In structures such as the Tanjore Brahman,
 where the father-son relationship is assured by common residence and
 inheritance, it is precisely the rights of the MB which are elaborated
 at all *rites de passage*, and the ZS has formal obligations at this man's
 funeral.

121 In the matrilineal structure of Malabar and Ceylon we find in con-
 593 trast that the great proliferation of ceremonial is concerned with the
 764 rights and obligations of the father. Quite apart from the entire com-
 plex of *Tali kettu kalyanam* in Malabar, we may note that the obliga-
 tions of the son at this father's funeral receive special emphasis, par-
 ticularly among the Nayar. As Fawcett notes in connection with Nayar
 funerals: "The deceased's younger brother, or, if there is none sur-
 (604) viving, his nephew (his sister's eldest son) sets fire to the pyre at the
 head of the corpse. If the deceased left a son, this son sets fire at the
 same time to the pyre at the foot of the corpse" (Thurston, 1906, p.
 209). At this most solemn occasion the Nayar and the Kandyan
 (171) Sinhalese agree on balancing the obligations of the offspring of brother
 and sister, for with the Sinhalese, too, the ZS as well as the son must
 partake in the final rites of a man.

121 There is always the emphasis on the connections between the chil-
 593 dren of the brother and the sister. Brother and sister must be sepa-
 605 rated, but their offspring must also be united. Dumont writes of the
 double principles of consanguinity and affinity, but it seems that the
 121 two must be intermeshed to protect and perpetuate the purity of
 602 the family. Perhaps this is an aspect of the union of those divine crea-
 171 tive principles which one hears so much about in Indian philosophy:
 812 male and female, man and wife, the Brahman Lord and his consort,
 771 Shiva and Shakti. These are two, but they are also one.

• 771 Even the terminology of kinship exemplifies the idea of the union
 (601)

THE CROSS-COUSIN IN SOUTH INDIA

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of the two principles in one. Thus, such terms as *massina* (Sinh. and Tamil) and its variants *maittunan* or *maccinan* (Tamil) and *maiduna* (Kannāda), all of which carry the implication of cross-cousins who are expected to unite, appear to be derived from the Sanskrit *maiduna* or *mithuna* which also refers to the sexual intercourse between the god Shiva and the goddess Shakti, who are both one and two.¹⁰ The depiction of them in the very act of union (*mithuna*) is one of the intriguing motifs in Indian religious sculpture, a form of art which in its formal beauty and religious expressiveness is almost unmatched.

These ideas are not intended to be mysterious. They are simply the logical implications of caste principles carried to their very limit in the highest caste. There should be no doubt at all that Indian thinkers, great logicians and great mystics, should have been concerned with the ultimate origin of purity.¹¹

A conception such as this, the union of man and wife, who are also the children of a brother and sister, allows us to observe the principle of *jati* ("caste," but also birth, category) from the inside. The narrowest circle is the individual. Then the couple, ideally cross-cousins. Then the small circle of kin who intermarry with one another. And going on from this, wider and wider concentric circles and the more inclusive categories of caste. The patterns of North India are likely to be different, but the principles of caste endogamy are intimately related to the family in South India and Ceylon.

Our itinerary has now been completed. We started from a mountain village in Ceylon and widening our investigations have ended up in South India. Behind the great differences in thought and behavior, we have found that the general principles of kinship appear to have considerable uniformity in this region. Ostensibly, kinship systems can be classified as matrilineal, patrilineal, hypergamous, and bilateral in Ceylon: a rapid journey through the Tamil-speaking parts, the Nilgiri Hills, and the Malabar coast has made us aware that a similar classification is possible in South India. But all these variations appear to exist within the framework of principles common to all the groups we have considered.

It is to be hoped that it will be possible in the future to carry the work farther north in order to learn whether South Indian structures are transformed into North Indian structures. In the realm of kin structure in South India and Ceylon, we appear to be dealing with

¹⁰ On the etymology of the terms see Karve (1953), p. 209.

¹¹ It seems possible that one of the simplest and most frequent ritual acts in Ceylon and South India—the splitting of a coconut into two and allowing the liquid inside to run out—may be a part of *mithuna* symbolism. For the coconut has a male and a female end: in the act the male and the female are split. This is an idea of wide prevalence in Ceylonese ritual; see Yalman (1966).

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